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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 04/22/09

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(1) SACO-era Defense Agency division director reveals that he held talks with U.S. side with deployment of Ospreys at Futenma replacement facility in mind; Possible questions and answers prepared without touching on deployment plan

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 1) (Full)
April 21, 2009

Takumi Takimoto, Ikue Nakaima

Defense Policy Bureau Director-General Nobushige Takamizawa was serving as the Defense Agency's Defense Operations Division director responsible for negotiations with the United States during the

period of the Japan-U.S. Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) that decided on the relocation and return of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station. Takamizawa revealed in an interview with the Ryukyu Shimpō yesterday that he had continued coordinating views with the U.S. side until immediately before the SACO produced its final report, while bearing in mind the deployment of MV-22 Osprey vertical takeoff and landing aircrafts at the envisioned Futenma replacement facility. It has also become clear through a U.S. document detailing input from Takamizawa that Japan and the United States, in anticipation of inquiries from local residents, had made arrangements to provide answers in a way not to refer to the plan to deploy [Ospreys]. The Japanese government has so far mentioned only the possibility of [the U.S. military] deploying [Ospreys] in the future. This is the first time that a government official responsible for negotiations [with the U.S. side] has admitted to having talks on the deployment of Ospreys.

It is clear that the deployment of Ospreys at the Futenma replacement facility was excised from the draft SACO final report at the request of Japan. The existence of a secret bilateral commitment to deploy Ospreys has once again been exposed.

In the interview, Takamizawa avoided referring to what had specifically been discussed between Japan and the United States, saying, "I don't remember." About the reason why the deployment of Ospreys was eliminated from the SACO final report, Takamizawa said, "Because the deployment was uncertain."

The document in question was presented by the U.S. Department of Defense in connection with a suit over dugongs [an endangered

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species of mammal in waters off Okinawa]. It is a five-page fax message of November 27, 1996, sent by the US Forces Japan Command person in charge to such places as the U.S. Pacific Command and the office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense. It discusses the draft final report and comes with a list of possible questions and answers regarding the deployment of Ospreys and response guidelines.

The document titled "GOJ Input to Relocation of MCAS Futenma" notes: "The following input was provided by Mr. Takamizawa of the JDA to USFJ/Defense Plans Department."

It also notes this about the replacement facility: "Some of the helicopters are scheduled to be replaced by Ospreys around 2003." The answer to a possible question is designed not to mention the deployment plan specifically, specifying, "Even if the MV-22 is picked as the follow-on model in the future, the aircraft is said to be operational under the same conditions."

"Although we cannot deny the possibility of [the U.S. military] deploying [Ospreys] in the future, we hear that nothing has been determined specifically," is the government's current answer at the Diet. It is in line with the list of possible questions and answers.

(2) Government starts negotiations with U.S. on change of helipad installation site near village in Futenma relocation plan

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 1) (Full)
April 22, 2009

Shin Yoshida, Shogo Yotsue

The Japanese government unofficially asked the U.S. government to change the planned installation site for a helipad on the southwestern side of the coastal area of Camp Schwab in Henoko, Nago City, to which the U.S. Marine Corp's Futenma Air Station is to be transferred. Among the four planned installation sites for helipads, only the site on the southwestern side is located near Henoko village. Japan and the U.S. have already started coordination at the working level, according to informed sources yesterday. The plan to install helipads at the alternative facility is included in a document concerning procedures for conducting the environmental impact assessment whose copies the Okinawa Defense Bureau presented to Kure and other relevant communities on April 1. Nago and other

communities have reacted strongly to the helipad-installation plan.

A senior government official said: "Local communities are only worried about one location close to a village. The number of helipads will not be reduced from four to three, but changing the location in question should be possible through talks with the U.S. side." The official indicated a positive view about changing the installation site.

The government has already notified the relevant prefectural and municipal governments of a plan to start talks on changing the location. The helipads to be installed at the facility will be used for helicopters' vertical takeoff and landing practices. At Futenma Air Station, there are seven helipads, and the U.S. military has asked Japan to move four of them to the new facility.

The procedure document includes the results of assessments of noise generated during hovering flights of Ch-53, CH-46, UH-1, and AH-1 --

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rotary-wing models that generate the highest levels of noise -- at Futenma and nine adjacent areas.

Noise levels over 70 decibels (dB) are regarded as bothersome to the majority of people. On the assumption of helipads installed at four sites, the expected peak noise level was 78.1 dB in Henoko Port, 74.5 dB on a hill in Henoko, 73.7 dB in Henoko village, and 72.4 dB at National Okinawa Industrial High School Vocational School.

Nago Mayor Yoshikazu Shimabukuro expressed his opposition to the plan in a meeting of the Relocation Council on April 8, saying: "The residents have called on the government to move the construction site further offshore, stemming from a desire to reduce aircraft noise. The helipad-installation plan goes against their wishes.

(3) Yachi's comment on return of 3.5 islands creating stir;
Government desperate to cap it

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
April 22, 2009

A newspaper reported the comment by Shotaro Yachi, government representative and former administrative vice foreign minister, in which he suggested that Japan should resolve the dispute over the four Russian-held islands off northeastern Hokkaido by having Russia return 3.5 islets. With Yachi's comment, debate on measures to resolve the dispute is now picking up momentum. Although the government has upheld a policy of having all four islands returned as a package, it appears to have a desire to find a breakthrough in the deadlocked situation. With an eye on a visit to Japan by Russian Premier Vladimir Putin in May, there is also an aspect that the Japanese government is observing how Russia will act. Therefore, it remains to be seen if Yachi's call for the return of 3.5 islets will lead to a breakthrough in the territorial dispute.

"The remark by Mr. Yachi is extremely serious. Even an influential Russian newspaper carried his comment," said Yukihiisa Goto, a Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) member, in a session yesterday of the House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Goto made Yachi the target of his criticism. Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone reiterated: "As I think that his remark is serious, I reprimanded him." However, there are no signs of resolving the situation.

The Mainichi Shimbun carried an article about an interview with Yachi, in which he revealed the idea of having Russia return the Kunashiri Island, the Habomai islet group and part of the Etorofu Island of the four disputed islands. The idea is that Japan and Russia should equally divide the entire areas of the four islands. Prime Minister Taro Aso, during his tenure as foreign minister, mentioned the return of three islets and the idea of splitting the total landmass of the four islands into two, but he later retracted his suggestions.

The Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office are desperate to put a cap on the matter. Yachi turned home from the United States

yesterday afternoon. He told reporters at Narita Airport: "I didn't say so." However, he added: "I feel that some of my remarks might have caused misunderstanding."

Yachi served as administrative vice minister under then Foreign Minister Aso. It was said that the appointment of Yachi as

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government representative was aimed to strengthen efforts to deal with the issue of the Northern Territories. This is the reason why many observers say that Yachi's comment is believed to reflect Aso's wishes.

In the past, various measures were floated to resolve the territorial row. For example, the so-called "Kawana proposal," in which then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto told then President Boris Yeltsin that the northern border should be drawn between Ostrov Urup and the Etorofu Island, while accepting the situation of the four islands. The government's position is that it will deal flexibly with the issue once the ownership of the four islands is resolved. Various measures to resolve the issue follow the extension of that argument.

However, since Russia has turned down Japan's any proposals, the negotiations have been stalled. Under such circumstance, the idea of dividing the whole areas of the four islands has often been talked about.

Russia, too, has reacted to Yachi's comment. The Russian newspaper, Kommersant, reported in detail the contents of his comment and the explanations by Nakasone and other government officials. The newspaper also carried an article referring to Aso's suggestion during his tenure as foreign minister.

ITAR-TASS dispatched an expert view from Tokyo yesterday: "There seems to be no doubt that Yachi made the remark intentionally, all the more because he is a close aide to Aso." In his summit with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Aso called on Medvedev to present a reply by their next summit. However, whether Yachi's comment will have an impact on the next summit is unknown. Many observers view that since Russia's top priority in bilateral talks with Japan is economic cooperation, the possibility is low that Russia will seriously deal with the territorial issue.

(4) U.S. gives up on building reprocessing plant, casting pall on nuclear fuel cycle

ASAHI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
April 22, 2009

Toshihiko Katsuta, Eisuke Sasaki, Washington

The U.S. has given up on a plan to build a spent nuclear-fuel reprocessing plant and a fast-breeder reactor due to questions about and opposition to spending huge amounts of money without a clear outlook on the realization of nonproliferation. A test run of Japan's reprocessing plant for commercial use is already underway, and Japan was set to extend technical cooperation to the U.S. However, Japan is also saddled with a mountain of challenges ahead, such as construction costs and technical problems.

Japan has same difficulties: Multiple problems during test run

Experts say that the advantage of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel is that nuclear waste can be reduced through the effective use of resources - extracted plutonium. Japan has adopted the nuclear fuel cycle as its basic nuclear policy and is the only non-nuclear weapon state that is authorized to reprocess spent nuclear fuel for commercial use.

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Concerning Washington's policy switch, a senior Natural Resources and Energy Agency official said, "This will not affect Japan's

policy." The energy self-sufficiency rate of Japan and France, which have been tackling spent nuclear fuel reprocessing for commercial use, is low. This official takes the view that the situation in Japan is different from that of the U.S., which developed the plan in 2006.

However, Japan faces problems common to the reason that has made the U.S. switch its policy. Japan has technical challenges to overcome, and the costs involved are enormous.

Japan spent 2.193 trillion yen for the construction of a reprocessing plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture. It is estimated that reprocessing for the next 40 years will cost another 19 trillion yen. Utility companies are allocating some funds for this purpose from electricity charges. Though the plant has started a test run, full operations have not yet started due to a number of difficulties in the waste disposal process. Problems with domestic technology have emerged and repairing damages is also time-consuming.

The process involving the fast breeder comes after reprocessing. The present plan is to burn plutonium in a plutonium-thermal reactor at an existing nuclear plant. However, the fuel-saving effect of this method is small. If a fast breeder is used, it will be possible to breed more fissionable materials than the amount of fuel spent. Japan aims at putting this method into practical use by around 2050. However, when using a fast breeder, handling the sodium used for cooling becomes problematic. Operation of the fast breeder reactor Monju has been suspended since 1995, when a sodium leak occurred.

It is viewed that the Obama administration will take a severe stance on the construction of new nuclear facilities with nonproliferation in mind. The government will start looking into a second reprocessing plant, following the one in Rokkasho Village.

University of Tokyo Visiting Professor Tatsujiro Suzuki said, "The U.S. policy switch could affect Japan over the long term if a plan emerges to have multiple countries control nuclear fuel cycle facilities."

Japan opted for a reprocessing and fast breeder reactor policy in its nuclear policy guidelines adopted at a cabinet meeting in 2005. However, if the stalled nuclear fuel cycle project, starting with the construction of a reprocessing plant, becomes protracted and the construction cost balloons, a call for revising the plan could flare up again, as in the case of the U.S., which has decided to pull out of the project to build reprocessing plant.

ZUMWALT